



## News Release

**For immediate release**

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### **UHC Supports CDC Updated Quarantine Guidance New Tools Launched to Help People Monitor Symptoms**

**BILLINGS, MT** – Recently the Unified Health Command announced support for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) updated quarantine guidance. While the CDC still recommends 14 days of quarantine for people who have been exposed to COVID-19, it did approve two other options for quarantine.

- Staying home and away from others for 10 days. If no COVID-19 symptoms develop in that period, the person can end quarantine if they continue to monitor themselves for symptoms through day 14.
- The second new CDC option is to end quarantine after day 7 – if the person has no symptoms and tested negative for COVID-19 five days or more after exposure. In addition, the person should continue to monitor for symptoms for the remainder of 14 days.

Anyone who is released from quarantine prior to 14 days must be extremely vigilant in wearing their mask, maintaining distance from others, and maintaining hand and surface sanitation. Shortening the quarantine period increases the risk of post-quarantine disease transmission so it is necessary to continue to follow public health guidance to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

RiverStone Health does not have the capacity to provide testing for people who have no symptoms and want to end quarantine after day 7. Therefore, it is recommended that those in quarantine complete the full 14 day duration in case symptoms appear if testing cannot be obtained.

To help people monitor symptoms, RiverStone Health recently launched an information system allowing people who are sick or who have been exposed to COVID-19 to voluntarily track and report their symptoms and recovery to RiverStone Health.

The Sara Alert information system application relies on people to voluntarily enroll and record their symptoms daily by text, email, or phone. This will allow RiverStone Health case investigators to focus on high-risk and non-reporting individuals.

The Sara Alert system will help increase efficiency in tracking cases, which will lead to earlier containment of the virus and a reduction of burden on public health resources.

Sara Alert is supported by the CDC and is already used in other states and in some Montana communities.

Montana State University Billings was the test pilot for Sara Alert in our community. MSUB started using the system in mid-November. Aaron Like, Associate Dean of Student Engagement at MSUB says they first used Sara Alert to more effectively communicate their contact tracing efforts to RiverStone Health.

“We’ve enjoyed working closely with RiverStone Health these past eight months to keep our campus community healthy and safe. We’ve been able to hire our own MSUB contact tracers which has helped to quickly and efficiently identify close contacts and move them into quarantine within hours of a positive notification,” said Like. “Piloting this new contact tracing app (Sara) has helped streamline the daily communication between MSUB and RiverStone Health. Utilizing this app provides the ability for real-time data, improved communication with close contacts, and a more efficient and effective contact tracing process overall.”

The Sara Alert system’s data is encrypted to ensure privacy and HIPPA compliance. RiverStone Health will manage the data and no other jurisdiction or entity can access the sensitive data.

RiverStone Health also recently launched a new data tool to help manage the increasing number of people infected with COVID-19. The Case Investigation System (CIS) data tool is an electronic case investigation and data collection platform that allows RiverStone Health to increase case investigation productivity. The system allows staff to electronically report test results to the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

“CIS enables a quick turnaround to assign cases for investigation, case investigation without duplicating the process, time efficiency to allow for more cases to be investigated and real time data reporting.” says Shawn Hinz, RiverStone Health’s vice president of Public Health Services.

Hinz says since the launch of CIS, case investigation now begins on average 12 hours sooner, is able to restart calling non-household contacts with information on quarantining and can produce more accurate and timely reports. These reports can help determine possible community outbreaks and clusters.

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